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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005310

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: RULING AK PARTY COMPLICATES ITS ITS POLITICAL
FUTURE AND EU CANDIDACY: SEX, HYPOCRISY, AND NIKEPHOBIA

REF: A. ANKARA 5200

[B](#). ANKARA 5113

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman; reasons: E.O.
12958 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: AK Party (AKP) government's reversal of course by a renewed insistence on criminalizing adultery and subsequent suspension of passage of the new criminal code until after the Oct. 6 release of the EU's progress report on Turkey's candidacy; EU's insistence that Turkey pass its new criminal code before Oct. 6; and PM Erdogan's harsh rejoinder that no one should interfere in Turkey's internal affairs have complicated AKP's political standing and Turkey's EU candidacy. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) PM Erdogan's zigzags on criminalization of adultery (reftels) appear to stem from more than the mixture of incompetence and unclear intentions -- i.e., the possibility of a hidden agenda -- that has dogged AKP since it came to power in Nov. 2002.

[1](#)3. (U) Erdogan's uneven course reflects the pressure he is under to square his EU aspirations, which in this specific instance would mean foregoing criminalization of adultery, with the need he keenly feels to respond to a party base disturbed by his advance and retreat on other social issues of long-standing interest to much of the base. These issues include the right to wear Islamic headscarves in universities and official spaces (e.g., parliament), expanded access to Koran courses, and discrimination against general university entrance for graduates of preacher (imam-hatip) high schools. In this regard, the Sept. 16 column of influential Islamist columnist Ahmet Tasgetiren in vocally pro-AKP "Yeni Safak", warning the AKP leadership that the party's base has had enough of indecision on these issues, is a strong signal that Erdogan's room for maneuver is closing.

[1](#)4. (C) Influencing Erdogan's domestic political calculations are the pressure for criminalization brought to bear from four directions:

--"Aksam" Ankara bureau chief Nuray Basaran, the Turkish journalist with the best access to Erdogan and his wife Emine, affirmed to us Sept. 17 that Emine, who has strong influence on her husband's party-related decisions, has put unrelenting pressure on her husband to act in response to the sexual peccadilloes of Education Minister Huseyin Celik and Erdogan foreign policy advisor Omer Celik (ref B; no relation).

--Abdurrahman Celik (no relation), a key advisor to influential Islamic lodge leader Fethullah Gulen and a guru to scores of AKP MP's, including Justice Minister Cemil Cicek, acknowledged to us Sept. 14 that it was Cicek who persuaded Erdogan to approve the original, sudden gambit to criminalize adultery and fornication (ref B).

--Basaran and the staffer for a conservative AKP Gaziantep MP also affirmed to us Sept. 17 that various NGOs from the Fethullah Gulen lodge have lobbied AKP MPs intensively in the past few days to ensure inclusion of criminalization of adultery to draw the attention of core anti-Gulen elements of the Turkish State away from criminal code amendments which would remove clauses that formed the legal base for still-open prosecutions of Gulen, and caused Gulen to seek (continuing) residence in the U.S.

--AKP Istanbul MP Nimet Cubukcu, a lawyer and the party's highest-profile woman MP on legal issues, insisted to us Sept. 16 that criminalization is strongly supported among women in the party's base. With just the official count of imam weddings (used as a normal equivalent of church weddings or to give a man a religious stamp of approval for sexual relations outside his legally-recognized marriage) at 1.2 million and women in the conservative eastern Black Sea region expressing outrage at what Cubukcu reported as numerous instances of prostitutes from the Caucasus or Russia being taken as concubines, criminalization would be at least a first step to try to deter abusive use of imam weddings. Turkey has a very different set of problems around the status of women than EU member states in this regard and has to have the freedom to tackle these problems in a way consistent with Turkey's traditions, she asserted.

15. (C) AKP's move to keep criminalization of adultery in play is likely to cost the government and party leadership dearly for several reasons.

16. (C) First, it is considered further proof for those both in the core elements of the State and in more mainstream conservative but anti-AKP circles, that Erdogan, FomMin Gul and others have not in fact broken with their radical Islamist upbringing. In this regard, Yasar Okuyan, a former Labor Minister from center-right ANAP and a classic pious-but-liberal (he drinks) heartlander who shared a university past with both Erdogan and Gul in the nationalist-Islamist Turkish National Student Union (MTTB), is only one of many experienced center-right politicians and analysts who patiently insist to us that, despite their pragmatic demeanor, Erdogan and -- to a much more ideological extent Gul -- remain political Islamists.

17. (C) Second, it will give core elements of the State, especially the Turkish General Staff, which under CHOD Ozkok has carefully refrained from more than reminding everyone of certain redlines, a clearer sense that there are fault lines within AKP, including growing resentment at Erdogan's high-handed ways and AKP's ability to stumble just when it approaches the finish line, eventually exploitable by indirect ("post-post-modern") means. In this light Okuyan told us Sept. 17 that if instead of challenging AKP's base in a way which seems to demean the base's religious faith and is thus counterproductive, the TGS could begin seriously to erode AKP's popularity by pointing out the party's failure to deliver on its headscarf and other promises and rank hypocrisy on adultery. Okuyan says there are at least 85 AKP MPs with more than one wife and that 23 of these relationships are long-term.

18. (C) Third, the move does not enjoy uniform support in AKP, either among cabinet members and MPs or more broadly. Despite Cubukcu's observation that criminalization has wide support among AKP's women supporters, three women research assistants to AKP deputy party chairmen (one uncovered, two with turbans) sought to tell us Sept. 16 at party headquarters they consider it unwise to pursue the issue now, especially given the loss of momentum the controversy will cause just as AKP appears headed for success on the EU front.

19. (C) Fourth, EU Ambassadors in Ankara, including the Dutch presidency, told Ambassador Edelman Sept. 16 there is an EU consensus that, even before AKP's attempt to resuscitate the adultery issue, the initial gambit did considerable damage to Turkey's momentum in EU capitals and cast doubt on the probability the EU will issue a clear invitation at its December summit to start the harmonization process in 2005. What is especially troubling to the EU Ambassadors here is the unwillingness of the GOT leadership -- above all Gul -- to take the point that renewing the criminalization drive will cast an even deeper shadow over Turkey's candidacy.

110. (C) Comment: Erdogan's tough-guy rejoinder to the EU to avoid interference in Turkey's internal affairs betrays his, and a broad cross section of Turks', total misunderstanding of what EU harmonization entails. At the same time Erdogan, Gul and others in the AKP leadership are desperate to get an EU start date in December since they know they and their government will face a huge, and perhaps terminal, political management problem if they fail. Judging by Erdogan's and Gul's pattern of retreating from tough statements when faced with concerted resistance, we expect they will return to trying to square the circle of competing EU and domestic exigencies.

111. (C) Comment contd.: However, if Erdogan and Gul interpret the October EU progress report as substantially narrowing Turkey's chances for a yes in December, we should be prepared to see Erdogan pre-emptively wrap himself in a nationalist-Islamist flag. In a broader sense, we should heed Okuyan's observation that Erdogan's, Gul's and in general AKP's dualism (e.g., east versus west; Islamism versus tolerance and modernity), in other words the instinctive preference to dissemble that flows from their Islamism, will continue to cause them to dig their own traps and to fail to carry through to success even with a positive EU decision in December. End comment.

EDELMAN